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CHALLENGE OF LEADERSHIP

FROM JOB OFFER TO DAY ONE

RECRUITMENT AT A TURNING POINT

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WELCOME

SIMON KENT
EDITOR

There are not many weeks left to 2026, and the recruitment industry is already concerning itself with the new year. Perhaps this is to be encouraged – and you'll find it laced through this month's issue. There have been some signs of revival and positivity in the wider economy, the occasional green shoot which while, perhaps, not business changing, is at least reason enough to look forward to a fresh start.

What does this mean for recruiters? Firstly it's already a time for reflection – what has gone well this year, what could do with further investment or consideration? How are markets faring and are there any adjustments or inclusions that could be made to improve the reach and service offered by the recruitment business?

Second this is a time to consider your own processes and practices within the business. Inefficiencies and inconsistencies can creep in over time, compromising the performance of the business and causing frustration among some employees. Identify these, make a change and start afresh for the new year.

Finally, the tech question much be addressed. AI is not the answer to all your problems, it even brings its own problems along with it. However, the opportunities presented by automation and technology are unquestionable and simply continuing with the status quo is to be left behind.

None of this could indicate radical change – sometimes it takes one adjustment to make all the difference, but thinking about these aspects now could make 2027 a year to remember. ■

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HOME OFFICE SETS ASIDE £80.7M FOR IR35 FAILINGS

Analysis of The Home Office's latest accounts by CoComply suggests the department has set aside £80.7 million to cover potential historic breaches of IR35. The department's Annual Report and Accounts 2025-26 include a £74.5 million provision for employment taxes and interest, plus a £6.2 million VAT accrual.

Analysis by CoComply has found that the liability comes from supplier contracts that the Home Office first treated as 'contracted-out' services. These contracts were later found to be supplies of workers. That means the department, rather than its suppliers, may have been responsible for assessing those workers' tax status.

The £74.5 million remains a provision rather than a final settlement with HMRC. The accounts do not name the suppliers or say how many workers are affected.

The disclosure is the latest in a run of large IR35 bills across the public sector. In February, the Post Office was hit with a £104 million HMRC bill, which the Department for Business and Trade is funding. Last month, the Cabinet Office disclosed a £38.5 million liability, with a possible further £8.9 million penalty.

Michael Cleavely, founder and CEO of CoComply, said: "What makes the Home Office case so significant isn't just the size of the figure but the cause. Most IR35 failures come down to getting individual contractor assessments wrong. Here, the problem started much earlier. Contracts were labelled as outsourced services when the department was, in effect, buying people.

"Engaging a consultancy under a Statement of Work doesn't make it a genuinely outsourced service," says Cleavely. "What matters is how the work is delivered, who manages the people and who is responsible for the outcome. The contract's title counts for far less than how the arrangement works in practice.

"Large organisations often have hundreds or thousands of people working through suppliers, and no single team sees the whole picture. Procurement signs the contract, finance pays the invoice and the business manages the work. If an engagement is wrongly classed as outsourced at the start, it can skip IR35 checks entirely. That's why classification has to happen at the outset and be reviewed as arrangements change."

CoComply warns that private sector organisations face the same risk, particularly when engaging consultancies, professional services firms and technology suppliers. ■



REC WELCOMES PAY TRANSPARENCY

The REC have described the Government's stance on pay transparency as a 'win-win' for the labour market.

Responding to Prime Minister's view that businesses should publish salaries in job adverts, Maxine Bligh, Interim Chief Executive at the Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC), said of the move: "It leads to better recruitment because candidates know what is on offer and employers attract applicants whose expectations match the role."

However she also noted that pay transparency must work in practice.

"Salary ranges should be realistic and meaningful, with clear information about bonuses and commission," she said. "Candidates should use that information to compare opportunities and make informed decisions."

Bligh also added that reducing the number of young people who are NEET will ultimately require wider action on careers advice, skills and employability support. "Recruiters are experts in how pay information is communicated in the labour market and look forward to working with government to ensure any new requirements deliver for jobseekers without creating unnecessary complexity or duplication for employers and recruitment businesses," she concluded. ■

WORKERS PASSED OVER FOR PROMOTION RECONSIDERED AFTER AI USE



HiBob, has released new research revealing how AI is now informing some of the most consequential decisions in the workplace, from pay rises (50 per cent) and promotions (51 per cent) to performance ratings (64 per cent) and redundancies (42 per cent).

Crucially, the findings suggest AI is working in employees' favour. More than half (57 per cent) of HR professionals using AI to review people decisions say it has prompted them to reconsider an employee initially passed over for promotion, while 43 per cent report a more favourable final decision on pay rises and 40 per cent on promotions following an AI-informed review.

That willingness to take another look extends to managers' judgements. Almost three-quarters (73 per cent) say they have used AI information to challenge a manager's proposed people decision, including 42 per cent who did so because an employee's or candidate's skills or potential had been overlooked.

The findings suggest AI is giving HR professionals the Organisational Intelligence needed to question managers' assessments and identify talent that might otherwise be missed.

Recruitment and performance reviews are also seeing different outcomes. Among those using AI to review these decisions, 40 per cent report a more favourable outcome for a candidate's progression through recruitment or job offer, while 42 per cent report the same for employee performance ratings.

"AI is here to stay, and it's changing how businesses operate," says Ronni Zehavi, CEO and Co-Founder of HiBob. "But this isn't just about technology. It's about making better decisions. If AI can help HR challenge a manager's assumptions and recognise talent that might otherwise be overlooked, that's a huge opportunity.

"This is where organisational intelligence comes in. By connecting information about people, skills and performance, we can understand the bigger picture and make smarter decisions. HR leaders have an opportunity to lead this transformation, not simply react to it."

Beyond individual career decisions, HR professionals are using AI to analyse workforce information (47 per cent), screen candidates or review hiring recommendations (45 per cent) and prepare or review performance assessments (40 per cent). Almost a third (31 per cent) have used it to plan changes to jobs, skills or how work is organised.

Adoption varies across HR functions, however, with more than a third of teams not currently using AI information for pay-rise recommendations (38 per cent) or promotions (33 per cent), while 39 per cent do not use it for grievances or disciplinary matters.

As AI becomes part of these decisions, HR teams are also putting checks in place. The majority (59 per cent) say AI information is checked for accuracy and relevance, while 45 per cent review proposed decisions for unfair or inconsistent treatment and 41 per cent consider individual circumstances that AI may have missed. ■

FOUR IN TEN UK EMPLOYERS FACE MID-LEVEL SKILLS GAPS



Research from Hays suggests four in ten (40 per cent) UK employers are facing critical skills gaps in mid-level professionals. This skills gap is becoming a significant barrier to growth as businesses struggle to secure the experienced professionals needed to turn their ambitions into action. As firms strive to boost productivity and deliver transformation, 27 per cent of employers also report shortages in leadership capability. More broadly, more than 85 per cent of employers experienced some form of skills shortage over the past year. Poor succession planning to replace seasoned colleagues is also a key issue.

The annual Hays Workforce Trends and Salary Report 2027 draws on insights from more than 11,200 professionals and employers including responses over 1,200 senior leaders and C-suite decision-makers.

The study reveals that some of the most acute skills gaps are among experienced professionals who can turn strategy into delivery, and these pressures are being felt across specialisms. Nearly half (47 per cent) of technology employers say AI, machine learning and data science capabilities are the hardest to hire, while 36 per cent of business support employers highlight commercial awareness and business judgement as the most difficult to secure.

In HR, 26 per cent of employers point to HR technology and systems capability as their greatest capability gap. In construction and property, skilled labour shortages are a key pressure on project delivery, while life sciences employers report scarce specialist clinical, manufacturing and technical expertise. These capabilities are increasingly critical as organisations look to deliver transformation and improve productivity.

Many organisations are also pursuing ambitious transformation and productivity agendas without significantly increasing headcount. While 39 per cent plan to increase hiring next year, almost half (48 per cent) plan to invest in AI and automation over the next 12 months to achieve their top organisational goal, compared with 24 per cent planning to increase permanent headcount.

“The findings show that for many organisations in the UK, the challenge is not about defining the strategy but having the right people in place to deliver it,” says Tom Way, Hays CEO for UK and Ireland. “We’re seeing growing pressure in the layer of experienced professionals who translate ambition into action, lead teams, manage projects and drive transformation. These are the people who keep businesses moving forward. When that capability is missing, growth can be impacted, productivity suffers and senior leaders find themselves focused on resolving issues rather than pursuing opportunities.”

When it comes to hiring, businesses identified attracting the right permanent talent as their biggest workforce challenge (35 per cent), followed by budget pressures versus market expectations (25 per cent).

Mr Way added: “The good news is that business ambition remains strong. Workforce readiness now needs to match intent.

“Many organisations are investing in transformation and emerging technologies, but our findings suggest workforce capability is becoming the barrier between what are very good plans, and actual, delivered impact.

“We are certainly not seeing a blanket freeze. But we have entered a super selective phase for UK business, as employers look for every new hire to make a meaningful impact.

“To close the gap, employers need to look beyond the external market alone. That means investing in developing their existing people, building clear succession pipelines before experienced colleagues step back, and taking a more specialist approach to finding the people with the skills to turn plans into delivery.” ■



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THE CHALLENGE OF LEADERSHIP AT A TIME OF AI

Soft skills are becoming the hard currency of leadership says Adam Pacifico, host of The Leadership Enigma Podcast.



I remember one wintry evening in north London [when the author was working as a Metropolitan Police Officer] being called to a domestic incident that had escalated into a hostage situation. A man had taken his mother hostage and barricaded himself inside the family home. >



When I arrived, my colleague was already talking to him through the letterbox. Calm, resilient and a gifted communicator, he wasn't a trained hostage negotiator. He was simply connecting with another human being.

Then the Inspector arrived. He assessed the situation and within seconds chose not to intervene. He realised the best person for the job was already doing it. Rank and experience had little to do with what needed to happen next.

Ten minutes later, the door opened. The suspect gave himself up and his mother was unharmed.

Thirty years later, I advise CEOs and leadership teams in some of the world's largest companies. They are wrestling with AI, geopolitics, culture wars and economic uncertainty, a future in which even the most experienced can suddenly feel like rookies.

I find myself thinking back to those cold London streets. The most senior person may increasingly have to look elsewhere for the answer. Decades of knowledge and experience remain valuable, but they are becoming table stakes. Something else is required.

For years we have confused managing with leading. AI is exposing the difference.

AI can increasingly schedule, update, brief, research, analyse, sense-make, present and communicate. The instinctive conclusion is that the human leader is therefore being diminished.

I think the opposite is happening.

The race to make AI more capable is unlikely to slow simply because some people are uncomfortable with where it might lead. The commercial, scientific and geopolitical incentives are too powerful. Companies fear being overtaken by competitors; nations fear being overtaken by other nations. Even leaders who harbour serious concerns about the technology operate inside a system that rewards continued acceleration.

That makes this much more than a technology story. It is a profoundly human one.

Behind the race sit some of our oldest instincts: curiosity, ambition, competition, fear, status, wealth and power. We may be building unprecedented intelligence, but many of the forces propelling us towards it are ancient.

The leadership question therefore cannot simply be how quickly we adopt AI. It must also be whether we retain sufficient human agency as we do so.

As machines become better at what humans do, organisations will have to pay much more attention to who their leaders are being and the lived experience they create for those around them.

For six years, I have interviewed more than 300 CEOs, academics, authors, military commanders, police officers, Olympians and others about the human being behind the human doing.

Their accomplishments varied enormously, but certain qualities kept appearing: vulnerability, humility, empathy, curiosity and an ability to connect with others. More strikingly, many of the most accomplished seemed comfortable sitting with uncertainty, drawing on people around them and admitting they did not have all the answers. >



Garry Ridge, who led WD-40 Company for 26 years, once flew to London to join me in the studio. Reflecting on what he described as his apprenticeship in leadership, he told me that three of the most powerful words a CEO can use are: “I don’t know.”

For years, leaders have talked about “soft skills”, as though the human elements of leadership were fluffy additions to hard-won technical expertise. AI changes that calculation.

Technical knowledge is increasingly accessible. Information is abundant. Analysis at enormous scale is becoming cheaper. Yet organisations still routinely promote brilliant technical practitioners only to discover that expertise in a discipline does not automatically translate into an ability to lead human beings.

The skills we called “soft” are becoming the hard currency of leadership.

There is an economic logic to this too. As AI makes intelligence more abundant, distinctly human qualities become relatively scarcer.

Information becomes abundant. Analysis becomes abundant. Content becomes abundant. Eventually, many forms of expertise may become abundant too.

But trust does not. Nor do courage, judgment, accountability, belonging, empathy or genuine human connection.

This is what I think of as the Human Premium.

The value of human leadership does not rest on our ability to outperform machines at processing information. That is a competition we will lose. Its value lies in our ability to provide meaning, exercise judgment, accept responsibility and create the social conditions in which other human beings can perform.

The more artificial intelligence we create, the more deliberately human leadership may need to become.

That does not make this a human-versus-machine argument. It is more nuanced than that. The challenge is deciding which parts of managing we should happily relinquish to machines and which human capabilities become more valuable precisely because technology cannot replicate them.

Shortly before his death, psychiatrist Dr Mark Goulston told me about a conversation with a prominent CEO who was also receiving palliative care. Looking back on his life, the executive realised that much of what he had considered important no longer seemed so while things he had undervalued suddenly mattered enormously.

There is a lesson there for the AI age.

Technology may create extraordinary amounts of capacity. The more interesting question is what leaders choose to do with it.

Billions are being invested in AI, but transformation will ultimately succeed or fail on its human foundations and behaviours. CEOs should ask not simply, “Can AI make us more efficient?” but “What will we do with the capacity it creates?” >

Will we demand still more output, or create greater space for people to think, learn, experiment and exercise judgment?

Every major AI investment should therefore answer two questions: How will this improve human performance and experience? And who at executive level is accountable for that?

If organisations can find millions for the technology but little for their people, that isn't transformation. It is cost cutting.

There is another question I believe belongs increasingly on Executive agendas: What must we never outsource to AI?

We should willingly outsource tasks. We should augment decisions. We should use machines to give people capabilities previous generations could barely imagine. But there is a difference between augmentation and abdication.

A machine can provide a recommendation; a human being must still be accountable for the consequence. It can generate an answer; leaders must still decide whether it is the right answer. It can make us faster; it cannot tell us what is worth pursuing.

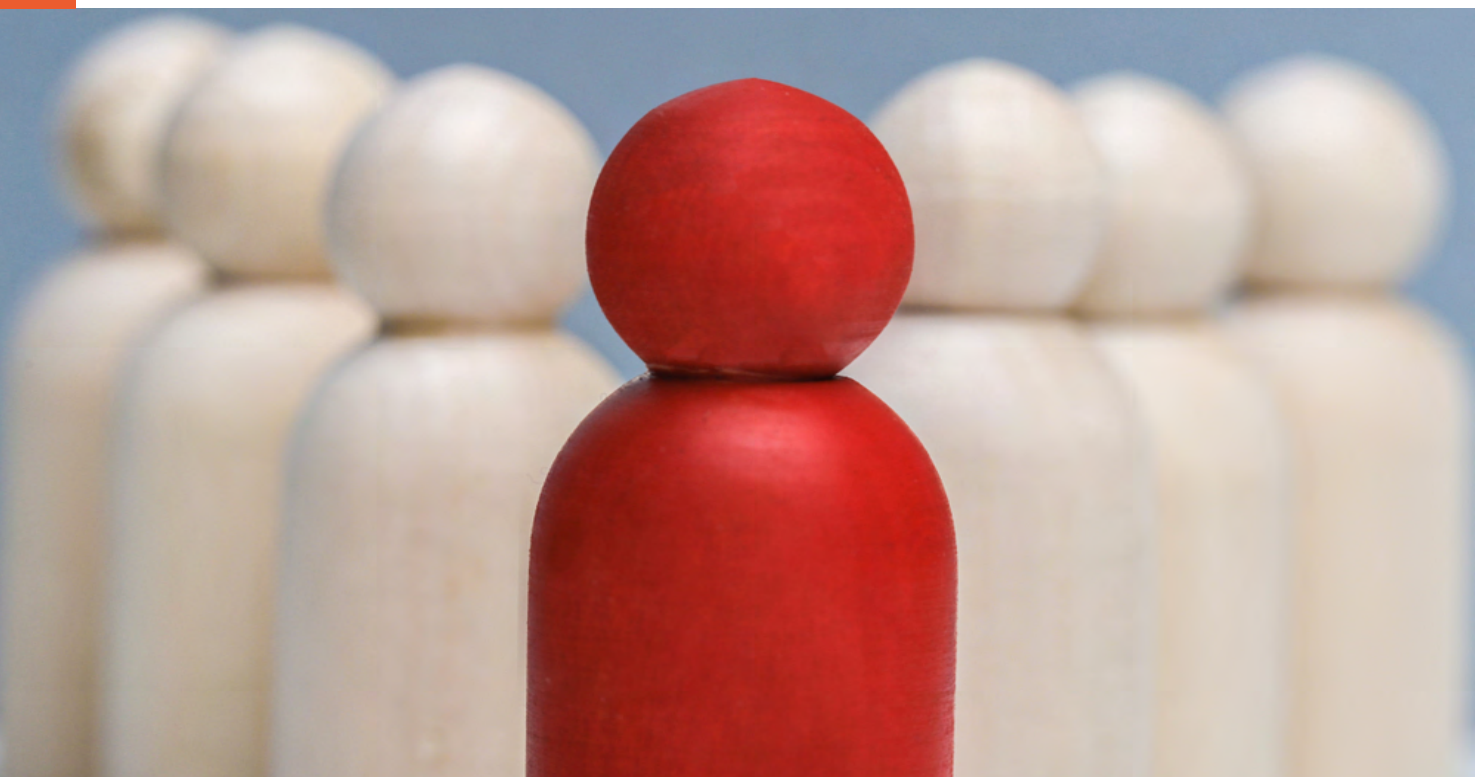
The greatest risk may not be that machines suddenly take human agency from us. It may be that decision by decision, we voluntarily surrender it.

AI doesn't replace leadership. It exposes it.

And understanding what makes us human may have become the most important leadership challenge of all.

The Leadership Enigma can be found here: https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/the-leadership-enigma/id1515806311

Adam is also a partner at Heidrick & Struggles. ■





RECRUITMENT AT A TURNING POINT: CONFIDENCE, INNOVATION AND DELIVERING VALUE

It's been a challenging and uncertain time for the recruitment industry. However, there are positive signs of improvement both in the industry and economy. Not only that but the need for a more agile workforce would seem to be playing into the hands of the contract recruitment sector, while advances in AI use and technology more generally also suggest the sector may be on the cusp of better times. With this in mind The Global Recruiter, together with 3R, held a breakfast round table discussion, bringing together some select recruitment business leaders to discuss the current direction of the industry, how the temporary sector is faring and what initiatives and factors are becoming important for these businesses in staying ahead of the curve, taking advantage of current trends and preparing for what's to come.

This meeting saw the following people come together:

Barnaby Morton-Turner, UK Sales Director, E-Resourcing
Simon King, CEO, Autotech Group
Barry Ansell, Global Head Contract Recruitment, Harrington Starr
Dan Brogan, Managing Director, 3R
Kim De'ath, Business Development Director, 3R
Simon Kent, Editor, The Global Recruiter
Gary King, Publisher, The Global Recruiter

The meeting started by identifying some sources of renewed confidence. Noting some significant challenging events dating back to Brexit, COVID, changes to IR35, economic uncertainty, the rising costs of employment and compliance issues it was felt that the sector, and perhaps the economy in general, is starting to look forward again rather than dealing with extraordinary situations or their aftermath. There's a sense of realism in the air, however: no one is expecting a sudden surge in demand or a significant change of fortune, instead there is an awareness that opportunities do exist and with the right approach and some strategic thinking, growth is now possible. >



While recruiters may not be looking for huge gains, market trends feel more sustainable enabling businesses to build steadily and confidently. This also provides the perfect backdrop for recruitment businesses to identify operational changes, efficiencies and innovations, all of which can impact on the bottom line, either directly or by making the work of recruitment consultants easier and more targeted.

While technology may seem to be the main focus for innovation within recruitment companies, the fact is that greater efficiency within all processes is helping to create a backdrop against which recruiters can move forward in other ways. Recruitment companies are looking to be leaner and more efficient in what they do so that other resources - consultants, finances and so on - can be dedicated to business development activities. This can mean outsourcing some functions while retaining the data and strategic benefits of the service, ensuring compliance standards are met, while removing the day-to-day heavy lifting involved with these functions.

It was interesting to note that recruitment companies will consider outsourcing functions such as payroll to gain efficiencies within their own businesses. However, it was emphasised that doing this required a great deal of faith in the supplier of the service - but as 3R's Kim De'ath noted by getting these partnerships right contract recruitment businesses can unlock far-reaching value across their operations.

"There's real power in getting the right outsourcing partnership," she said. "It shouldn't feel faceless or disconnected. It should feel like you've gained a team that understands recruitment, believes in your business and has your back. With the right visibility, trust and support, that partner becomes an extension of your own team and plays a genuine part in the experience you create for your contractors and clients, and ultimately the brand you build."

Naturally, somewhere in this discussion had to be the use of AI. Only a few years ago this technology would have been viewed as just another potential development in the background - something that companies needed to be aware of but cautious about. Today, however, AI is a critical part of every business' thinking. Some of the recruiters around the table are working in sectors where entire departments have been created to work with AI, finding the best way for that business to use it, and while recruitment companies may not have the resources to do this on quite the same scale, the importance of exploration and implementation where possible is unquestionable. >



Understandably, and importantly, the question is no longer if AI should be used but how it must be used to get maximum value. It is easy to become excited by the diverse applications of AI and simply assume it is bringing a positive influence into the business. It is also difficult to maintain complete control over its use when consultants and employees use that technology outside the workplace and want to bring those tools into their working lives. The implications for data security are important here, but perhaps the biggest challenge remains getting value from how the technology is used.

Finding new opportunities can be made more complex by the fact that in many sectors jobs are changing radically. The skills and demands of a role seem to be constantly developing and as a result recruiters need to be able to have in-depth and informed discussions with their clients to understand current and future demands and to find the right people to answer their talent needs. These discussions can - and indeed do - go beyond simply filling vacancies. Often it means helping to address the complete talent pipeline.

One aspect of the recruitment sector that seems to still be true is that value can be gained from identifying and working in detail through a specific niche. The phrase ‘inch wide, mile deep’ has been used for many years, but in the age of AI and increasing efficiency this can be particularly valuable.

One participant noted that there is always the temptation among recruitment consultants to go wider than the area they are initially recruiting for - particularly when opportunities emerge on the periphery of the particular niche you’re working on. The temptation to take work that falls outside that area can prove too much, but it can also mean resources and effort are dissipated and the business does not build as strongly as it might have done. Going after an apparent opportunity might yield short-term results, but it also needs to be remembered that doing so can water down the power the recruitment brand might otherwise have had.

At the same time, however, there are opportunities to expand the value recruiters can bring to their talent pipelines. Adding in services, being more specific about the skills that can be supplied all help to integrate recruiters into the sectors and areas where they are working. The result is that they become recognised specialists in their field - the go-to suppliers for that area of talent. >

Interestingly the inspiration and opportunity for making such steps forward frequently come from casual meet-ups, face-to-face conversations and general discussions rather than specific outreach business development work.

Recruitment companies that are in a position to explore possibilities and offer more value are those who will continue to grow and succeed. And very often the key to being able to do that is to have a highly efficient back-office function underpinning everything that business does.

“A recruitment business should have most of its operation running like clockwork,” comments 3R’s Dan Brogan. “That doesn’t mean everything has to be rigid, quite the opposite. When the day-to-day runs consistently and reliably in the background, it frees your people up to focus on what really drives the business forward: building relationships, developing new opportunities and growing revenue. That’s what gives a business the capacity to adapt, diversify and explore new opportunities, rather than constantly being pulled back into the day-to-day.”

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FROM JOB OFFER TO DAY ONE

Alex Onoufriou, Group HR & Talent Director at G&P Quality Management Ltd, argues that in today's competitive recruitment market, the acceptance of a job offer is where the real work begins.



For generations, recruitment followed a relatively straightforward path. An organisation advertised a vacancy, shortlisted candidates, conducted interviews and made an offer. Once that offer had been accepted, the difficult part was assumed to be over. That has all changed. >



Organisations managing their own recruitment are increasingly facing a frustrating and costly challenge: candidates who accept a role but subsequently withdraw before their first day. According to the CIPD, 27% of UK candidates have reneged on a job offer ahead of their planned start date.

For employers, the implications go beyond the disappointment of losing a prospective employee. Recruitment involves considerable investment in advertising, candidate sourcing, interviews and management time. If a candidate drops out at the final stage, much of that investment has to be repeated - while the vacancy remains unfilled and the organisation may have to start the process again.

An accepted offer, therefore, should not be regarded as the finish line. It is the beginning of another important stage in the relationship between employer and candidate.

The Dead Zone

Traditionally, many organisations have treated the period between offer acceptance and a candidate's first day as little more than an administrative gap.

While the employer may consider the recruitment process complete, the candidate does not necessarily see it that way. In today's employment market, talented people are often involved in several recruitment processes simultaneously. Digital recruitment has made it easier than ever to apply for opportunities, interview remotely and receive offers from multiple organisations.

The result is that candidates can continue weighing up their options long after they have accepted a role. Meanwhile, their existing employer may be fighting to retain them. A resignation can trigger a sudden conversation about promotion, pay or flexibility - discussions that perhaps should have happened much earlier. At the same time, other employers may continue to approach them with alternative opportunities.

Against that backdrop, employers cannot simply assume that an accepted candidate will automatically arrive on day one. They need to continue engaging with them.

From Onboarding to Preboarding

Perhaps we also need to rethink what we mean by onboarding. For many organisations, onboarding begins when a new employee walks through the door. But by then, an important opportunity has already passed.

The real onboarding process should begin the moment a candidate accepts the role. This period, sometimes described as preboarding, is about much more than contracts and compliance. It is about maintaining momentum, building confidence in the decision the candidate has made and helping them begin to feel invested in the organisation before they officially join.

The most successful organisations recognise that recruitment is not purely transactional. Salary and benefits matter, of course, but people also make decisions based on how an organisation makes them feel.

Do they feel wanted? Do they understand the culture they are joining? Have they started to build relationships with the people they will be working alongside? Do they understand the organisation's purpose and feel that they are going to play a meaningful role within it? >



These are important questions because commitment can begin to build well before someone's first day.

A simple introduction to their future manager, an informal conversation with colleagues, an invitation to a team event or regular updates about the role and the organisation can all help create a sense that the individual is already becoming part of the business.

Silence Creates Doubt

One of the biggest mistakes employers can make is allowing communication to disappear after an offer has been accepted.

Weeks can pass while contracts are processed and start dates approach. During that time, the candidate may be receiving regular calls from other recruiters, fresh job opportunities or encouragement from their current employer to reconsider their decision.

Silence creates space for doubt. Regular, meaningful contact does not mean bombarding someone with emails or turning the period before they start into an administrative burden. It means having a deliberate strategy for engagement.

That could involve introducing candidates to their future manager, arranging informal conversations with colleagues, sharing relevant information about the role or simply maintaining regular personal contact to answer questions and reinforce their enthusiasm for the opportunity ahead. The key thing is that the candidate does not feel forgotten.

A Relationship, not a Transaction

At G&P, we know how the relationship with a candidate needs to evolve throughout the recruitment journey. As specialist providers of highly skilled talent for the manufacturing sector, we deploy temporary workers and contractors, permanent placements and provide managed and unmanaged services to OEMs and suppliers across sectors including defence, aerospace and automotive.

With more than 400 contingent workers currently working across our operations, more than 220 hires made so far in 2026, we see first-hand that there is no single, standard approach that works for everyone.

While every candidate and every recruitment process is different, maintaining engagement between offer and start date is an important part of achieving that level of conversion. That's how at we've achieved an 'offer-to-day-one' conversion rate for G&P-hired employees of more than 98%. People have different motivations, expectations and concerns. Some may need regular reassurance about practical arrangements. Others may be particularly interested in the projects they will be working on, the technology they will encounter or the people they will be joining.

That means recruitment teams need to understand the individual, not simply manage them through a standard process. >

It's all about dialogue. The better we understand why someone has chosen a particular opportunity, the better we can maintain their enthusiasm and address any concerns before they become reasons to walk away.

That principle applies from the very beginning of the recruitment process. At G&P, we have a database of more than a million highly skilled, vetted candidates across engineering, technical and inspection services. Building those relationships and understanding candidates' skills, experience and aspirations helps us to match people with opportunities that are appropriate for them in the first place.

Our hiring teams also support clients with candidate engagement through to day one, helping to maintain communication and momentum after the offer has been accepted.

It is important to recognise that loyalty cannot be taken for granted. The employment market has changed, and switching behaviour has changed with it. Employers need to earn commitment rather than assume it comes automatically with an accepted offer.

Recruitment is a Continuous Process

The organisations that will be most successful in attracting and retaining talent will be those that recognise this new reality. Recruitment is increasingly a continuous process of communication, engagement and relationship building – from the first conversation through to the candidate's first day and beyond.

That requires a more considered approach to onboarding and preboarding. Recruitment teams need to think carefully about every point at which they interact with candidates and ask a simple question: are we strengthening this person's commitment to joining us, or are we allowing it to weaken?

In a competitive market, the difference can be significant. Skilled candidates have options and organisations need to continue demonstrating why their opportunity is the right fit. The period between accepting a job and starting it may appear relatively short, but it can have a disproportionate impact on the success of a recruitment process. An accepted offer should therefore not be viewed as the finish line. It is the point at which the process of building confidence, commitment and a sense of belonging really begins.





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What if your operating model was part of your client proposition?

By Dan Brogan, Managing Director, 3R

When recruitment businesses talk about their client proposition, the conversation tends to focus on people. Great consultants, specialist market knowledge, strong relationships and, ultimately, the ability to find great talent.

All important. But they're not the only things a client experiences.

They experience your onboarding and compliance. Your timesheet system and approvals. Your invoices. How quickly questions are answered and, crucially, what happens when something doesn't quite go to plan.

Nobody wins a client because their invoicing process is brilliant. But get these things wrong often enough and they can quickly undermine the relationship your consultants have worked hard to build.

The experience behind the service

The best client experiences often come down to something fairly simple: being easy to work with. That means having an operating model that delivers consistency where clients expect it, but enough flexibility to deal with the real world.

Strong processes shouldn't mean blindly forcing every client down the same route. Larger clients and RPOs will inevitably have different requirements. The real value of a well-structured operation is having the capacity and expertise to accommodate those differences without reinventing the wheel every time.

In practice...

One agency brought us into a pitch with a prospective large client so we could understand how they worked first-hand. Rather than making assumptions about what they needed, we adapted elements of our usual process around their requirements, helping the agency present a solution that worked operationally from day one.

There's another benefit too. The more smoothly the operational side of a recruitment business runs, the less time consultants spend chasing paperwork, resolving invoice queries or navigating internal processes.

That gives them more time to do the things clients actually value them for: understanding their business, advising them, solving problems and finding good people.

In practice...

One agency wanted to place more contractors with a major client, but payment terms and available credit were restricting growth. We joined the client negotiations directly and agreed improved terms that created more headroom for the agency to grow the account.

Sometimes, good operational support is about helping remove the barriers standing in the way of an opportunity.



Your partners are part of your proposition too

Outsourcing a problem doesn't automatically solve it. Choose the wrong partner and you can simply move the friction somewhere else, often further away from where you can see it.

Choose the right one, however, and they become an extension of your business. Clients may never know where your team ends and your partner begins, and nor should they need to.

What they experience is the outcome: responsive support, accurate processes, appropriate flexibility and confidence that things are being handled properly.

And clients do notice when it works. Perhaps the best proof is the feedback you weren't asking for. "*We constantly receive compliments on 3R's systems from many clients and candidates on ease of use and speed of service.*" Martyn Hurricks, Talent Locker

Ultimately, being a great recruitment business isn't only about how well you recruit. It's also about how good you are to do business with.

And in a market where clients have plenty of choice, the operation sitting behind your consultants might just be a bigger part of your proposition than you think.

OUTSOURCING FOR GOOD

Simon Kent investigates how outsourcing can create a platform for smooth and improved service from recruitment consultants.



At a time when efficiency is one of the most prized objectives for a recruitment company, outsourcing offers a practical way to ensure the business can deliver its services with maximum impact and minimum fuss. While the act of finding and placing talent can seem straight forward, the processes and administration work behind the scenes can slow down recruitment companies, creating extra cost and even leading to penalties if elements such as compliance requirements are not met. >



Getting the full benefits of outsourcing, however, means understanding what parts of a recruitment business can work this way and ensuring arrangement are made that provide a smooth and consistent service for end clients. Moreover, the potential gain isn't just a more efficient recruitment business – handled correctly outsourcing enables recruiters to offer a better service all round.

"Outsourcing works best when the work being removed is repetitive, standardised, and does not require much recruiting judgment," says Pratik Mahajan, Senior Data Analytics Solutions Associate at JPMorganChase. "Things like reporting, data preparation, scheduling support, system administration, or other back-office processes can consume a surprising amount of recruiter time without directly improving the quality of a hire."

Mahajan's assessment shows how recruiters can sometimes find their work held back by the need to take care of everyday processes. These administration tasks bring some value to the business – such as ensuring compliance – but they are not directly linked to the recruitment service delivered to clients and candidates. They don't require a frontline consultant's expertise and skills and can therefore be a distraction to their main objectives.

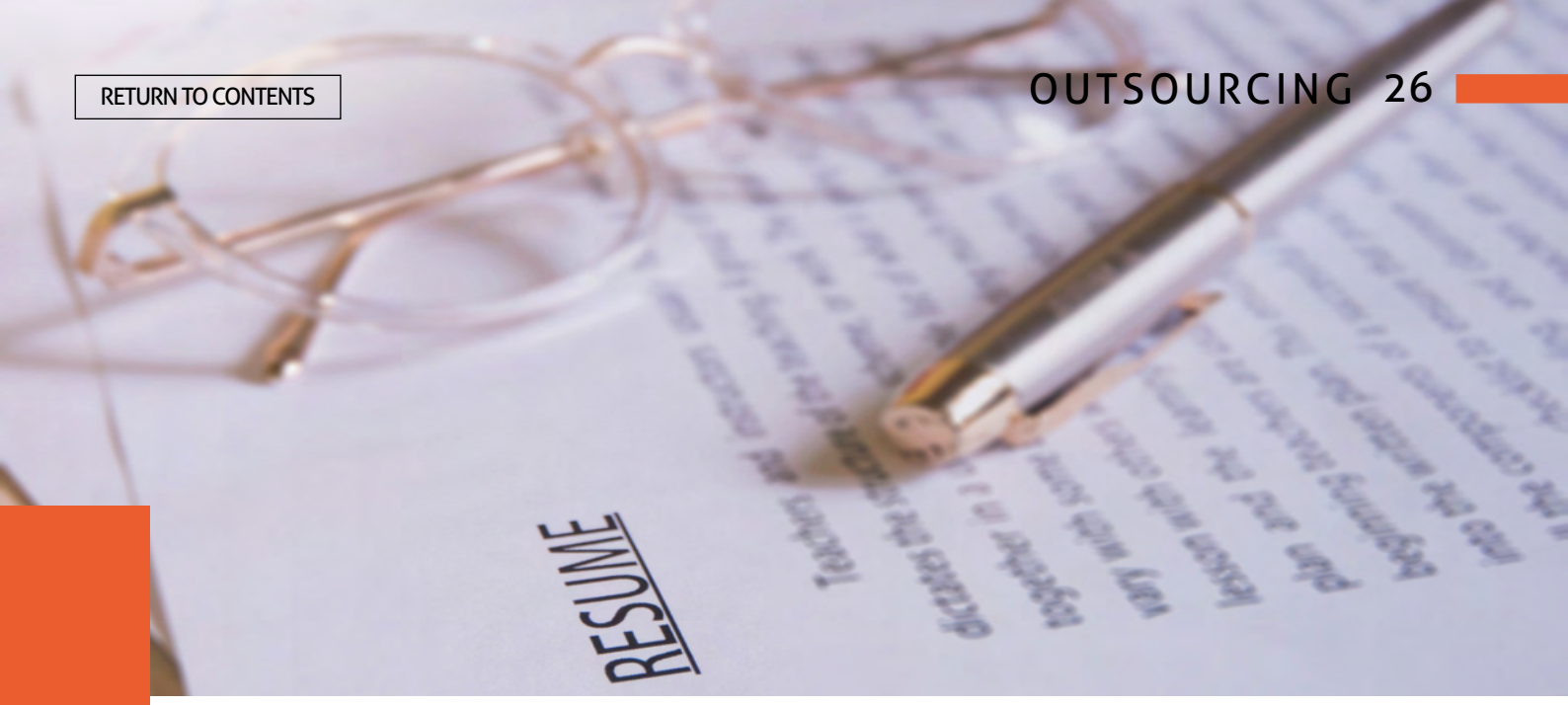
"The important distinction is what should not be outsourced," adds Mahajan. "Candidate assessment, conversations with hiring managers, understanding the role, and making judgment calls still need to stay close to the recruiter."

Therefore, as Mahajan's points out, the real benefit for recruitment companies is not simply reducing cost, but giving recruiters more space and time to do the work that actually requires their experience.

"I would measure success by whether recruiters spend less time on administrative work, whether turnaround times improve, and whether service quality stays consistent," he says. "If outsourcing simply moves the same inefficiency to another provider, it has not really solved the problem."

This is a crucial point. For an outsourcing relationship to truly work the outsourced task needs to be carried out with a level of efficiency and in a way that compliments the overall workflow. Without paying attention to this and making sure work is done efficiently, the recruitment business can still suffer. The aim, therefore, is not to just remove tasks from the recruitment business, it is to create a scenario where the recruitment service provided is smooth and adds value adding from start to finish.

This is echoed by Curtis Serna, Founder of Noticeable who are focussing on bringing AI and automation into enhancing business processes. For him, workflow issues must be corrected before outsourcing takes place. He explains that by analysing what actually happens in a process it may be discovered that some steps shouldn't exist at all, and some are only there because two systems don't talk to each other. "Cut those first," advises Serna. "Then whatever is left is clean enough to hand to a finance or tech provider. Outsource it as-is and you pay someone else to run the mess, usually at a higher cost because they bill for every extra step." >



Once the process around recruitment is properly managed and outsourced appropriately, the recruitment consultant can concentrate on delivering a higher quality service. Denis Apostu, Co-founder of hiring platform HeyVA identifies significant opportunity to outsource the work 'around' recruitment but is clear that the recruitment itself should not be touched – this aspect of the service needs to be reserved for dedicated and professional recruiters.

"Recruiters can spend a surprising amount of time on CRM administration, data entry, interview scheduling, candidate follow-ups, reporting, invoicing support and other back-office tasks," he says. "None of these tasks is unnecessary, but many don't require a recruitment consultant to personally handle them.

"When you move suitable operational work to dedicated remote support, recruiters can spend more of their day speaking with candidates, developing client relationships, sourcing talent and making placements," he adds.

Apostu gives the example of interview coordination. Scheduling an interview, updating the CRM, confirming availability and following up might only take a few minutes each time but across dozens of candidates and active roles, those small administrative tasks create constant interruptions throughout a recruiter's day. "Giving that workflow to dedicated support can create longer, uninterrupted periods for candidate calls, sourcing and business development," he says. Fewer interruptions means greater service.

"The question shouldn't just be, 'What can we outsource more cheaply?'" notes Apostu. "It should be, 'Which tasks are taking our recruiters away from recruitment?'"

As Apostu suggests, this question matters. Cost savings can be part of the business case but the bigger efficiency gain will always be recovering recruiters' time and attention.

"Recruitment is fundamentally a relationship-driven business," affirms Bryan DiGiorgio, Founder and CEO of US based 1840 & Company. "Clients want consultants who understand their hiring challenges, and candidates want personalised guidance throughout the process. When recruiters spend too much time on repetitive administrative work, they have less time for those important interactions."

For DiGiorgio functions such as recruitment coordination, data management, and back-office support can be effectively given over to dedicated professionals, freeing up consultants to focus on client relationships, candidate engagement, and business development.

"The goal shouldn't be to automate or outsource everything," says DiGiorgio, "it should be to create an operating model where technology handles repetitive processes, dedicated support teams manage operational workloads, and experienced recruiters focus on the work that requires human judgment." >

For DiGiorgio outsourcing starts with identifying which responsibilities genuinely require a consultant's expertise and which can be delegated to a dedicated support team. He also notes that if the outsourcing arrangement requires new processes or workflows there must be some work put in to ensure everyone understands how this will work: "There will always be some training involved, particularly around communication, workflows, technology platforms, and performance expectations," he says, "but agencies don't necessarily need to reinvent how their consultants work."

Again, DiGiorgio says the aim is to build an operating model that allows consultants to spend more time doing what they do best, while appropriately trained support professionals handle the surrounding operational work.

"Ultimately, the most effective outsourcing strategies don't replace the human element of recruitment," he says, "they strengthen it."

There is another argument here, however, for recruitment businesses who have aspirations to go further. While introducing efficiencies is always good for the business generally, if the company wants to expand, creating the right outsourcing relationship could be crucial.

With the right arrangements in place the recruitment business can not only concentrate on what it does best, it can unlock further potential and grow. Outsourcing doesn't just give the opportunity to scale, it provides that opportunity in a cost efficient and effective way.

"Agencies don't necessarily need to expand every internal department as they grow," says DiGiorgio. "Functions such as bookkeeping, administrative support, candidate database maintenance, and recruitment coordination can often be supported by dedicated remote professionals.

"This approach allows agencies to allocate more of their internal resources toward revenue-generating activities while maintaining the operational support needed to scale," he says.

Even for businesses who simply want to maintain their current size and service level, the administrative and compliance burden of everyday work can deliver a drag to the business, draining resources and compromising the impact of a consultant's talent. With the right outsourcing partnerships, however, it is possible to free talented consultants from these kind of burdens and let them – and the business – truly fulfil their potential. ■





A SERVICE THAT CARES

James Fowler's company Leaders in Care has been working with 3R for around 9 years. The business outsources its financial services to the provider, gaining a factoring service and technology that provide full visibility across its financial operations.

Over the years this relationship has created an environment where Leaders in Care has been able to grow significantly, adding new services to their roster with the assurance that the finance and payments side of the business can keep pace and continue to be delivered to a high standard for everyone.

According to Fowler, 3R's service has contributed to the business' reputation as a great recruitment business to work for and a great service provider. The financial systems provided as part of the service offer full transparency over the payment cycle and mean everyone knows exactly what is happening – which invoices have been paid, which contractors have been paid and so on.

When the business started out it was concerned with only permanently placements and 3R's factoring service gave the business the cashflow it needed to grow. As a result the company was able to gradually add new services and address new parts of the healthcare sector.

The business supplies personnel into the social work sector, interim care and more recently ADHD care. At part of this, the business added a valuable contractor service to its roster, which as Fowler notes, relies on strong and reliable financial services to deliver success. Today the company places around 140 contractors each week so getting the financial side of the right is crucial.

The first advantage Fowler highlights through using 3R is the certainty the service brings to paying the contractors they place. "Service is something we pride ourselves on," he says, "and we have some of the best reviews in the industry. Pay can be an emotive subject so getting people paid on time is always important. Because you have total visibility over the process you can run that side of the business really well." >

As Leaders in Care has grown 3R has expanded its service provision giving security and confidence for the business as they have taken on new projects. The service ensures the business works with credit-worthy organisations and gives the business financial security as it takes on new opportunities.

Alongside the financial support 3R's systems provide weekly reports which enable Fowler to monitor the performance of his business and give him the data he needs to make decisions for its future.

While there are clear benefits in the service level 3R offers, perhaps one of the most remarkable aspects of the service is the closeness of the partnership. "Everyone at 3R knows our business," remarks Fowler. "We have good relationships throughout the business from their MD to the compliance director. I know if I called them up I could have a good conversation with anyone there.

"The hallmark of a great relationship is that everything runs smoothly," he says.

The company have just enjoyed a record year alongside achieving highly commended for best specialist agency at the Global Recruiter Awards. As the business pushes forward into new parts of the sector and contemplates a US presence, the relationship with 3R will certainly continue to boost their activity and success.

